

Draft

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

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1. Executive summary

This draft strategy recognises the significant challenges currently faced in the public sector.

In particular:

- increasing financial pressures
- increasing expectations for greater involvement in the provision of future services and the development of services
- the demographic change that will impact on the services the public sector provides in the borough
- the need to influence behaviour, in particular around waste disposal, climate change, travel, lifestyle and health habits.

The Consultation and Engagement Strategy builds upon the processes that already exist across the council and with partners. It aims to embed best practice and maximise the benefits of engagement for all our citizens and local communities. It outlines how the council will continue to strengthen the way in which we involve citizens, service users, businesses and the voluntary sector to ensure that their continued involvement makes a real difference to their local area and the type of services we provide.

It also builds on the good practice of the first Engagement Strategy published in October 2010, and takes into account the requirements under the council's duty to consult as laid out in the Local Government Act 1999, and the updated 2011 Best Value Guidance, as well as the recent lessons learnt from the NSCSO Judicial Review in 2013.

The role of councillors as fundamental to the consultation process is emphasised, and it should be clear that council consultations are constructed to support councillors' decision making.

The strategy highlights how consultation and engagement activities will be effectively planned, which will be based on corporate standards and basic principles that will provide a consistent approach to consultation and engagement across the organisation.

The council's online consultation hub, Engage Barnet, will continue to publish all the council's consultation activities, including those that are targeted at only service users, so that all the council's consultations and how we involve residents and users in the development and improvement of our services are clearly visible. The central Consultation Officer will offer guidance on consultation design when required, and will quality assure all consultations. However, service consultation development and the administering of these will continue to be devolved to services. To aid in this process the central Consultation Officer has developed procedures to ensure all our consultations are published to the highest standard which include guidance and protocols on publishing to Engage Barnet, and bespoke consultation tools. A full consultation toolkit will be developed which will seek to promote an ethos where a wide range of techniques will be applied at the variety of levels of the engagement spectrum.

The strategy will also strengthen our approach to ‘giving local people and local communities’ real influence and power to improve their lives.

The strategy contains the following recommendations:

1. The council should expand the Citizens’ Panel¹
2. Depending on the topic/s and most appropriate method required, the panel should undertake four regular consultations a year, either ‘quarterly Omni-surveys’ of residents views or area-based workshops on service development or locality based issues
3. Advocate the use of more focus groups or face to face engagement (some recruited from the panel) to explore topics and issues in depth
4. The council should undertake two Residents’ Perception Surveys each year
5. All service consultations should be quality assured by the central Consultation Officer
6. Each consultation should always give feedback to participants on conclusions and how the council has responded to the findings of consultation
7. The council should publish a forward plan for consultations
8. The council should publish an annual review of consultation
9. The council should ensure that the development of a single customer account is undertaken with a view to fully engaging residents with the work of the council.

Effective community engagement demands particular skills, careful management and clear leadership including more strategic management from both our councillors and senior managers.

This strategy itself will be the subject of a consultation exercise, both inside and outside the council in order that the proposals can be tested, refined and “owned” by everyone involved in its implementation.

¹ The Citizens Panel is made up of 1500 Barnet residents, selected to be representative of the adult population of the borough in terms of ward, age, gender, ethnicity, housing tenure, faith and disability

2. Introduction

Barnet Council is committed to involving local people in shaping their area and the services they receive.

Consultation and engagement is one of the key ways the council interacts with and involves local communities and residents, providing them with opportunities to:

- gain greater awareness and understanding of what the council does
- to voice their views and know how they can get involved
- to have their views fed into the democratic decision making process.

Barnet already has a good track record on consulting and engaging local people as a normal part of service delivery. We have well-established structures such as a 1500 strong Citizens' Panel¹ and a network of Partnership Boards, user groups and forums; we undertake an annual telephone residents' perception survey; and we routinely undertake consultation across the full range of council activities. We also have strong linkages with our partners the Police, Public Health, NHS, Community Barnet, Communities Together Network² and the business sector. Elected councillors are also at the heart of consultation and community engagement in Barnet through the Residents Forums.

The strategy builds on these existing engagement mechanisms and seeks to:

- provide a framework for co-ordinating consultation and engagement
- recognise and promote good practice in consultation and engagement where it already exists within the council
- establish a system to enable quality assurance and standards on all aspects of consultation
- promote a consistency of approach throughout the council
- establish a means of monitoring the council in respect of its consultation performance
- identify the role of councillors in the consultation process
- provide residents, officers, and members with a clear statement of when the council will consult
- make recommendations for improving consultation and engagement in Barnet.

This strategy is supported by consultation protocols, and an internal toolkit which is currently being written by the central Consultation Officer. It will be published as a supporting document to this strategy and will further assist staff responsible for designing consultation and engagement activities to comply with the council's corporate standards and principles.

¹ The Citizens Panel is made up of 1500 Barnet residents, selected to be representative of the adult population of the borough in terms of ward, age, gender, ethnicity, housing tenure, faith and disability

² Communities Together Network act as an insight and information exchange and discussion forum for community engagement and to improve understanding amongst the council, strategic partners and community groups of what really matters to the different communities in the borough. It identifies and uses community expertise to sustain good community relations and support community cohesion.

3. Background: Local and National Context

3.1. Local context

The council's One Barnet programme focused on a new way of working which promotes greater efficiency, and a new approach of working with our partners and residents to ensure the people of Barnet can lead the lives they want to.

The strategy will align itself on the One Barnet key guiding principles of developing:

- a new relationship with citizens
- a relentless drive for efficiency
- a one public sector approach.

The Consultation and Engagement Strategy supports the council's Corporate Plan priority 'to improve the satisfaction of residents and businesses with the London Borough of Barnet as a place to live, work and study; promote responsible growth, development and success across the borough'.

The strategy also supports and is aligned to the Customer Access Strategy, the Information Management Strategy and the developing Transparency Strategy.

3.2. National Context

Community engagement has been at the core of the local government modernisation agenda for a number of years. Developing and enhancing involvement is seen as vital for supporting the legitimacy of local government, developing community leadership and improving service delivery.

There has also been a range of legislation and Local Government White Papers over recent years¹. Most importantly, all councils are under a general Duty of Best Value to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness"². In addition, each council is under a 'Duty to Consult'³ with representatives of a wide range of local people authorities must consult representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions. Authorities should include local voluntary and community organisations and businesses in such consultation'.

1 The Local Government Act 1999, updated with the DCLG Best Value Guidance 2011, the Localism Act 2011, 'Communities in Power: Real people, real power' (July 2008), the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (October 2007), Sustainable Communities Act (October 2007), and Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities' (October 2006).

2 Section 1 of DCLG's „Best Value Statutory Guidance 2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-value-statutory-guidance--4>.

3 Section 3(2) of the Local Government Act 1999

The Localism Act 2011 also includes the involvement of residents, of which a key part is the new set of rights for communities – the right to challenge, to bid and to build. This means providing more opportunities for local people to get involved and influence decisions that affect how their area develops.

The Consultation and Engagement Strategy will ensure the council continues to strengthen involvement and engagement particularly at a local level and thereby also complying with the Duty to Consult.

To achieve this we require a robust Consultation and Engagement Strategy that incorporates current legislation and policy demands of:

- Local Government Act 1999 (Best Value, Duty to Consult)
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Disability Discrimination Act (2005)
- Equality Act 2010
- Updated Best Value Statutory Guidance 2011
- Localism Act 2011.

4. Scope of the strategy

This strategy will be adopted across the organisation and it will promote more effective and efficient consultation to a consistent set of corporate standards.

The strategy is for use by the council's central Consultation Officer, council officers and elected councillors. We also anticipate that our partners, the voluntary and community sector, and the general public will also find it a useful best practice guide.

4.1. Engagement spectrum

'Engagement' is a term that is frequently referred to by the council and our partners and relates to the entire working relationship the council and its partners has with its citizens and communities.

It is important to recognise that under the engagement spectrum there are different approaches which will achieve different outcomes. Each will play a vital role in our relationship with our residents and can be used to support and complement each other. Effective engagement needs a customised approach which will build on our new relationship with citizens. Our diverse communities, citizens, customers and businesses all have different needs and will prefer to engage with us using different methods and at different levels of the engagement spectrum. Sometimes it may be appropriate just to inform our citizens about local issues or challenges the public sector faces, while at other times we will seek to involve citizens and communities in much greater depth.

In particular it should be stressed that engagement with residents and service users does not end with a decision being taken; there may often continue to be a need for ongoing engagement to ensure policy decisions are effectively implemented.

It is important that the council and its partners have a joint understanding of these terms for clarification and to avoid confusion.

Figure 1 highlights the scope of the engagement spectrum and how each stage increases the role of our citizens.

Figure 1: Barnet Engagement Model

Effective engagement in Barnet takes a number of forms					
	Insight	Informing	Consulting	Involving	Empowering
Aim	Understanding better the needs, views, and concerns of our residents	As an open council provide balanced information	Capture residents views on issues of relevance to them. Give an extensive range of opportunities for residents to have their say	Involve residents in testing, designing, and evaluating what we do	Build residents' capacity to deliver services and to promote independence
Tools	Service user data Value mode Cameo Secondary data Diversity monitoring, Resident events	Online/Social media Face to face local meetings, forums Newsletters Press Posters/Leaflets	Online/Engage Barnet/ Online surveys/ Social media Citizens' Panel: surveys, focus groups, workshops Service user panels Local forums Youth Board/Parliament	Virtual teams Challenge panels Co production of service development Online tools Youth Board/Parliament	Co production Resident run schools Online tools: Pledgebank/Fix my street Youth Board/Parliament
Examples	Residents profiling Customer profiling Councillor surgeries, Leader visits, ward walks	Barnet First, NHS, Police newsletters Press releases Resident Area forums, Committees, Web site/ social media/ Engage Barnet	Area forums system Council Tax Support Scheme consultation –a range of tools used Budget consultation online survey Citizen's Panel Corporate Plan Deliberative Event	Experts by experience Youth Board members sat on panel to recruit LBB Director Ward panels Town Centre Strategy's	Experts by experience Personal budgets Big Society Youth Board reps sit on School Health & Well Being Steering Group
Increasing the role for the resident					

The table below highlights what good engagement will look like on the different levels of the engagement spectrum.

What good engagement looks like	
Insight	Routinely harnessing insights from all our officer, service, councillor, and partner engagement activities and using them to drive service improvement
Informing	Give residents a good understanding of what the council ,councillors and partners are doing, and feel comfortable offering views on the future of public services Use resident insight into ensure we inform them in a way that works for them
Consulting	Our consultations should consistently provide enough information for residents to respond confidently, engage with representative set of residents, and provide an update to respondents explaining how their contribution has been used
Involving	A broad range of our residents will be involved in the work of the public sector. Use local councillors to build bridges between neighbourhoods and the state
Empowering	A significant number of residents and communities will be involved in controlling service design and delivery through a variety of different mechanisms

4.2. What are the benefits of effective consultation and engagement?

Effective engagement brings extensive benefits to the citizens and agencies involved. The main benefits are:

- **increased trust and transparency** – relationships and trust in the council and its partners will be improved through effective engagement between citizens, partners, businesses and the voluntary sector
- **increased democratic legitimacy** – for the council and its partners through devolution/localisation of decision making
- **improved reputations** – for the council and its partners and greater accountability because of more effective information dissemination and better dialogue
- **opportunities to influence** – citizens will be given the opportunity to have greater choice in the design, and delivery of our services
- **removes barriers** – it removes physical, language or social barriers to citizens and communities getting access to information or voicing needs or opinions.
- **improved citizen understanding** – citizens and local communities will be better informed and have a clear understanding of all our policies, priorities and the challenges we face
- **increased satisfaction** – evidence shows that effective engagement brings increased satisfaction with public services
- **shared skills and expertise** – effective engagement gives participants opportunities to learn new skills, share expertise and ways of working
- **citizens feel more involved** – streamlined engagement activity and regular information about results of what they said and how this has impacted service delivery
- **knowledge of local issues** – it allows service providers to reach a better understanding of their communities and be more in tune with needs or problems as they arise
- **community spirit** – it supports community spirit and encourages citizens to take control of their own neighbourhoods
- **improves opportunity for joint projects** – it can give rise to joint planning, development and delivery of services where appropriate.

However, in addition to the benefits, there can be challenges which we must be aware of and consideration needs to be given on how these are managed when embarking on any engagement activity.

These can be:

- **managing expectations** – citizen involvement can raise possible expectations about the amount of influence they have
- **resource-intensive** – effective engagement is often very resource-intensive
- **managing competing interests** – engagement will often expose diverse and competing interests. Managing how this is captured and reconciled may be complex.

5. Core objectives

In order for us to make decisions about services, priorities and performance, it is vital that we have accurate and reliable information derived from research, consultation and engagement. To help us achieve this the strategy has identified six objectives:

Objective 1: Strategic and coordinated

We will improve the planning and coordination of research, consultation and community engagement between delivery units and key partners, in order to improve methodology, avoid duplication and provide value for money. Our online consultation hub, 'Engage Barnet', will act as a key tool in this process.

Objective 2: Clear and consistent

We will provide clear guidance, and ensure our best practice principles are consistently implemented for research, consultation and engagement activities undertaken by the council and its partners.

Objective 3: Customised and innovative

For consultation and engagement to be effective we will ensure there is a customised approach that will build on our new relationship with citizens.

We will also make best use of new and imaginative ways to consult and engage with our residents and service users and encourage high quality engagement.

Objective 4: Inclusive and appropriate

We will ensure that all communities are supported and encouraged to participate effectively, through the use of appropriate methods of research, consultation and engagement.

Objective 5: Follow-up action

We will ensure that the outcomes of research, consultation and engagement are used to inform policy and decision-making and that appropriate feedback mechanisms are in place. We will always provide feedback through our consultation hub, Engage Barnet.

Objective 6: Actively involve

The council and its partners will support citizens and community groups to be actively involved in improving the service they receive and their communities.

Implementing these objectives does not necessarily mean that more engagement is needed. There is already a wealth of activity happening, with many more new projects planned; instead the council and its partners must ensure more effective use of current resources and not necessarily more. Harnessing the success of existing mechanisms and networks remains key.

Effective consultation and engagement will involve improvement on all our six objectives which will build on our new relationship with citizens and builds trust with our citizens.

The consequence of not implementing these improvements is that the council and its partners may waste resources for consultation and engagement activities that do more harm than good and further distance citizens. Constructive engagement is very resource-

intensive, but by implementing it efficiently there are real opportunities to ensure Barnet is shaped by its citizens and communities.

5.1. How will we achieve our core objectives?

Using this approach, the Consultation and Engagement Strategy will aim to deliver an effective and coordinated approach to engagement for the benefit of all citizens and the diverse communities of Barnet.

We will aim to:

- ensure citizens are informed of the work of the council and its partners through engagement activities
- strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
- involve end users in the design of services from beginning to end, so that the services best meet their needs
- provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities
- manage and co-ordinate engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation and avoid duplication
- ensure that engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community, particularly people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities
- listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
- provide variety, innovation, flexibility and choice in engagement activities
- develop activities to involve citizens in the democratic process, e.g. electoral participation, consultations, attendance at committee meetings
- listen and learn from our own and others' experience and share engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision-making.

6. Who we will consult with and engage

In terms of whom we will consult and engage with, this strategy covers any consultation, research, engagement or involvement activity.

This could be with:

- residents of Barnet
- service customers and users
- elected councillors
- members of staff/staff forums
- people who work, study or visit Barnet
- non-users and potential users of services
- businesses and business organisations
- interest and pressure groups, for example, tenant and residents associations
- voluntary and community groups
- communities and neighbourhoods
- groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, gender, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation
- hard to reach groups such as mobile populations, refugee communities, people for whom English is not the first language, or people who need specialist media
- public and private sector stakeholders
- Government organisations.

In addition, there is a pivotal role in facilitating and building engaging opportunities for local councillors, Residents Forums, and voluntary and community sector, each of which are outlined in this section.

6.1. Local councillors

Elected councillors have an essential role providing representation and a voice for local people; providing information and acting as a channel of communication; they also act as powerful advocates for individuals and as champions for users of local services. Elected councillors' unique community leadership role provides them with a major input into the consultation and engagement process.

Their role in consultation and engagement goes further than the use of results to inform decision-making. In addition to roles as ward councillors, where they need to manage differing and sometimes conflicting interests, councillors will also lead on consultation and engagement activities within the new governance arrangements planned for 2014. It is essential that elected councillors are aware of and involved at an early stage in the development of consultation and engagement activities, particularly where their ward is affected. This approach has numerous positive outcomes as their local knowledge of relevant issues, circumstances and groups can be invaluable to ensuring comprehensive and effective engagement is carried out.

6.2. New governance arrangements and Residents' Forums

New governance structures will allow residents to contribute to policy development at an early stage. They will make governance of the council and the development of policy more open.

Committee meetings

Details of the new committee systems can be found [here](#).

As well as being more open in the development and review of council policy, the new system, in addition to public questions, will allow committees to seek written public proposals at an early stage in policy development for some emerging policies. It is envisaged that such proposals will come from organisations and residents with a particular interest and experience in a service.

Residents' Forums

Forums were revised in 2013 after a public consultation. The revised format for forums can be found [here](#).

Area-based Sub-committees

The previous reform of forums linked them more closely to Environment Sub-Committees. The remit of Area-based Sub-committees will be extended further in June 2014 when each committee will have a designated budget of £100,000 to spend on local schemes.

These governance arrangements and Residents' Forums are outside the scope of this strategy.

6.3. The voluntary and community sector

Community Barnet works closely with and represents many of our local community groups and charities. Community Barnet will have a varied and key role to play in consultation and community engagement, from being a consultee directly, to acting as the liaison point between the council and local organisations working with particularly marginal or vulnerable groups.

The Charter (formerly Compact) was agreed between the London Borough of Barnet, local residents and the voluntary and community sector. The Charter is a principles document defining the shared values and aspirations between these parties, enhancing working relationships between LBB departments, residents and voluntary and community groups.

7. How we will consult and engage

The council will use various methods depending on the subject matter, the level of engagement required, and the type of stakeholders we are trying to reach, and in some cases this will require a multi method approach.

In summary these methods include:

- paper surveys
- online surveys
- social media –face book, twitter
- focus groups
- citizens panel
- youth board
- area forums
- deliberative conferences
- workshops
- budget consultation tools (simulator, simalto)
- consultative workshops
- in-depth interviews
- peer research
- user panels
- customer care journey mapping
- mystery shopping
- experts by experience
- ethnographic research
- road shows.

When selecting which consultation and engagement method is the most appropriate to use, the council will consider a number of factors including accessibility, equality, cost, effectiveness and timeliness.

On request, and within reasonable limits such as cost and timeliness, the council will provide individuals or organisations with an alternative method of consultation where the chosen method prevents them from being able to participate. An example of this would be providing on request an easy read version of a survey for a resident who has learning difficulties, or for an internet survey, to provide a paper survey to residents who are unable to access the internet.

The consultation and engagement toolkit will give further guidance on how to design a consultation that ensures the appropriate methods and formats are used.

8. Corporate mechanisms for promoting consultation and engagement and proposals for change

Barnet Council has developed an extensive network of corporate community consultation and engagement mechanisms and opportunities for local people to get involved. These are outlined below and are in addition to those discussed in section 7.

8.1. Engage Barnet

The introduction of Engage Barnet and the direct link to the site from the front page of the council's website has allowed the council to publish and promote all consultations in a single, easily accessible spot.

In summary the site aims to:

Give residents an opportunity to take part in a consultation

Engage Barnet is a place where residents can find out, and also gives an opportunity to take part in consultations. This may be through an online survey embedded on the page or a mail box supplied for residents to email their comments.

Promote other strands of the consultation

The site is also used to promote other strands of the consultation which may include for example an exhibition where residents can view plans, a consultative workshop, a road show, or focus groups that are being conducted as part of the consultation.

Give feedback to residents on how we have acted on the results

Engage Barnet is also where the council informs residents how we have acted on the results of all

our consultations. Feeding back is an important part of any consultation as it completes the consultation cycle and demonstrates how the council has listened.

As well as publishing consultations on the Engage Barnet, consultations are also promoted further, ensuring our consultation's reach all our different communities and stakeholder groups, using the many mechanisms the council has in place. Some are outlined in detail in this section and further guidance will be provided in the Consultation and Engagement Toolkit.

The strategy will ensure consistent high standards are achieved when publishing consultations, and propose the following quality assurance procedures:

- consultation approach and design to be quality assured by the central Consultation Officer
- any content to be placed onto Engage Barnet is signed off by the Consultation Officer
- closed consultations will be closely monitored to ensure results placed onto the site also have follow up actions to all participants.

8.2. Barnet Council website

Council websites are becoming an increasingly important communication and consultation channel for local authorities. In 2012, Barnet Council re-launched its website (www.barnet.gov.uk) giving residents a vast array of information about public services in the borough, how to access them or contact services directly. Residents can pay their Council Tax online or report issues such as graffiti or fly tipping. The website also has Engage Barnet clearly visible on the homepage, where residents can find out about past and current consultations; and take part in online consultations. There is also a dedicated consultation page and 'Get involved' page. The council will build upon this work with the development of a new website and ensure that the 'My Account' facility effectively supports engagement with residents.

- **the council should ensure that the development of a 'My Account' facility fully supports the engagement of residents with the work of the council.**

8.3. Barnet First

Barnet First is the council's quarterly magazine. It helps keep residents and businesses in the borough informed about what the council and its partners are doing and why, as well as providing information and news about the local area. It is hand-delivered throughout the borough. Copies can also be obtained from council receptions and libraries or it can be downloaded from the council's website. Officers and partners frequently use Barnet First to inform and consult residents through questionnaires and articles. For example, various articles were published in Barnet First in relation to the Council Tax Options public consultation. This was carried out from July to September 2012. The magazine was used to raise the profile of the consultation, encourage residents to take part but also

to feedback the results of the consultation and how they were used to inform the decisions taken by the council.

8.4. Barnet's Citizens' Panel

Barnet's Citizens' Panel currently consists of around 1,500 local residents which is profiled to be representative of Barnet's diverse community. Established in 1995, Barnet was one of the first councils to set up a panel. A third of the panel is replaced every year.

The panel provides a platform through which Barnet Council and its partners can listen to a representative sample of Barnet residents' perspectives on important issues and decisions which may affect them, the areas they live in and services they use.

A critical aspect of the panel is ensuring panel members and the wider community receive feedback on the results of these consultations, including how they have been used to inform decision making and shape future plans and services. To achieve this, the panel has its own dedicated webpage on the council's website and panel members are sent regular newsletters. This will be expanded as part of the council's commitment to properly inform residents who take part in consultations.

- **it is proposed that the size of the panel be increased to 2,500 residents. This should lead to substantial responses to consultations. The council will aim for major consultations to receive around 1,100 responses, to allow +/- 3% confidence in the accuracy of data**
- **in order to prevent consultation fatigue, the council will run quarterly consultations with the panel, rolling several service consultations in to a larger "Omni-survey" or area based panel workshops.**

8.5. The Residents' Perception Tracker Survey

As well as residents' views on specific policy and service proposals it is important that the council carefully tracks residents' perceptions on the borough and ensures that services consider residents' concerns and wishes wherever possible. In 2012/13 and 2013/14, the council used the results of the Residents' Perception Survey to direct funding from a service improvement fund in to areas as diverse as an apprentice scheme and maintenance of roads and pavements.

- **the council has moved this survey from biennial to biannual, running a smaller survey mid-year for tracking purposes. It is proposed to continue with this frequency.**

9. Other mechanisms for consultation and community engagement

In addition to the corporate mechanisms for consultation and community engagement outlined in the previous section, there are numerous other service forums, boards, groups, panels and channels whereby local people can get involved and have a say.

These groups will have a notable role to play in service-specific consultations, and at times corporate consultations, and will be used to specifically encourage comment on relevant service changes. The toolkit will provide a full list of these mechanisms with the relevant contact details.

Some of the key mechanisms are outlined in this section, although this is not an exhaustive list.

9.1. Service User Groups/Partnership Boards/Forums

There are numerous groups that exist in Barnet specifically to support and consult with service users. They all have varying terms and conditions, roles and responsibilities but ultimately provide service users in Barnet with an opportunity to feed back their views and improve how services are being delivered in the borough. Examples of these groups include Barnet Youth Board, Carers Forum, and the Over-55s Forum.

9.2. Housing groups

Barnet Homes is an arms-length management organisation (ALMO) and it manages 16,000 council homes (including 5,000 leaseholders) in the borough on behalf of the council.

Residents in these properties can get involved in developing services and influencing decision-making processes in a variety of ways including:

- **HUB meetings:** these are held every 3 months are open to all Barnet Homes residents to discuss services and other housing matters chosen by residents and board members
- **Performance Advisory Group (PAG):** a group of volunteer tenants and leaseholders that challenge and influence the way Barnet Homes provide services.

There are a number of other wider housing consultative forums aimed at partner organisations including

- **Housing Forum:** ad-hoc meeting that reviews key emerging housing policy issues and includes council and registered provider stakeholders
- **Private Landlords Forum:** a meeting of private rented sector landlords who let their properties to housing applicants and wish to help improve services provided by Barnet Homes and the council.

9.3. Healthwatch Barnet

Healthwatch Barnet is part of a new national Healthwatch network, giving people a powerful voice locally and nationally. Healthwatch was established through the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and is supported by a national umbrella body, Healthwatch England.

Healthwatch Barnet works in partnership with other local charities. It engages with people of all ages and from all communities to understand their experience of the quality and efficiency of health and social care services. It has a place on Barnet's Health and Wellbeing Board and Clinical Commissioning Group Board, as well as other local groups and Committees, to raise patient's and service-users issues, to help improve services.

9.4. Barnet Safer Communities Partnership Board

Barnet Safer Communities Partnership Board sets out the priorities of the Community Safety Strategy for the borough. Partners examine the results of all council and partnership community consultation where residents are asked about their views on crime and community safety. This will include results of the Public Attitude Survey, the Police Resident Attitude Survey, surveys and feedback from public meetings and events and the police ward panels.

Increasing community confidence and effective community engagement will remain a key priority for the partnership. Partners will be developing a community engagement plan (2014/15) setting out how they will engage with residents and partners on community safety.

9.5. Other ways to get involved and have a say

Other ways people can get involved and have a say include: contacting (write to, email or telephone) relevant council officers or departments; by submitting a complaint through the council's complaints procedure; submitting a Freedom of Information Request; contacting their local councillor or attending their councillor's surgery; attending council meetings or committees; or by submitting a petition.

10. How we will continue to improve

The following section outlines how Barnet Council intends to continue to improve its approach to consultation and engagement.

It sets out the corporate best practice principles and quality standards in relation to consultation and engagement; the importance of equalities to engagement; what success should look like and a consultation calendar outlining regular research, consultation and engagement activities that are undertaken.

10.1. Best practice principles and quality standards

The following best practice principles and quality standards will continue to bring about improved planning, co-ordination and consistency to consultation and community engagement activities undertaken in Barnet. These standards are now mandatory for all consultation undertaken by Barnet Council and they are also a good guide for partner agencies and set out what residents can expect.

The standards are:

1. **Procedural** – all consultation and community engagement activity will be discussed with the service, Engage Barnet site administrators and the central Consultation Officer at the planning stage, and all such planned activity will be added to the Consultation Forward Plan and be published on Engage Barnet.
2. **Needed** – we will check if anyone else has already undertaken consultation where the results could be shared and unnecessary repetition and duplication avoided.
3. **Clear, concise and relevant** – we will explain why we're consulting and how we're going to take people's views into account as part of the decision making process. All our information will be worded clearly and avoid jargon.
4. **Timely and well planned** – we will allow adequate time so that people have a proper chance to get involved. Sufficient time will be given to planning and conducting the consultation and for the results to be collated, analysed and considered.
5. **Inclusive and accessible** – we will involve the widest spectrum of the community in our consultations, including under-represented or marginalised groups. We will tailor our approach to the needs of the audience, recognising we need to consider levels of understanding, timeframes, accessibility of venues, childcare, language and appropriate means of communication etc. This approach is not only good practice but also helps to ensure the council meets its statutory equalities obligations.
6. **Appropriate methods** – we will use consultation methods that make best use of our resources and give the best results for the target audience. We will also be prepared to try new ideas and innovative approaches.
7. **Action-focused** – we will act on the findings to improve services, programmes and quality of life for local residents. Where a decision is contrary to the views of those consulted, we will give clear reasons why.
8. **Closing the feedback loop** – we will report back to the public what they've told us during the consultation and what we've done as a result of it.

The consultation toolkit and protocols will further assist staff responsible for designing consultation and community engagement activities to comply with the council's corporate standards.

10.2. Consultation and Equalities

Understanding the needs of Barnet's diverse community and ensuring an inclusive approach to consultation and community engagement is a key aspect of the objectives, quality standards and principles set out within this strategy. It underpins the ethos of Barnet Council as well as being a requirement of the Equality Framework for Local Government, and ensures compliance with legislative requirements as laid out in the Equality Act 2010. Further guidance on how to ensure consultation and engagement activities are inclusive and where necessary target marginalized or under-represented groups will be provided in the consultation toolkit.

Monitoring

Effective consultation and engagement activities should include standard equalities and diversity monitoring. Collecting such information helps us better understand our citizens and communities and target our services. The toolkit will provide standard monitoring questions around the nine protected characteristics as laid out in the Equality Act 2010. Due regard and consideration should be given to when the supplementary questions should be included; in particular will they add value and inform the consultation project or activity? Advice on this issue can be sought from the central Consultation Officer.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

Consultation and engagement is an important component of the EIA process. An EIA helps identify whether the implementation of a new policy or initiative or operation of a current policy, function or service affects different people or

groups in different ways. Thereby ensuring possible negative consequences are either eliminated or mitigated.

Existing research and consultation is often required to assess any potential impacts of proposals, while additional work may be required to fill any gaps and ensure people who are likely to be affected are consulted. An EIA toolkit has been developed to assist with completing EIAs. Further advice on EIAs can be sought from the central Equalities Advisor.

10.3. What will success look like?

Over the last few years, Barnet has already been working to strengthen how the council informs, consults, involves and empowers its community. Section 4.1 and Appendix 1 have set out in detail the difference between these levels of engagement, examples, and key considerations for each level of engagement.

As part of our ongoing improvement corporately, across council's delivery units, and in conjunction with our partners, Barnet will need to demonstrate through the normal course of business that:

- we understand the needs and interests of our local community
- we use this understanding to ensure information, consultation, involvement and empowerment opportunities are provided and that they target the right people and are accessible
- consideration is given to the appropriate level of engagement (using Section 4.1 and appendix 1)
- we adhere to the best practice principles and quality standards outlined in Section 10.1, and 10.2, although also taking into account wider factors (statutory guidance, resources and political priorities)

- local people feel that there are sufficient opportunities to get involved and they know how to access them if they want to. Our community should also recognise that the council's policies reflect this involvement and those services are accessible, responsive and tailored to the different needs of our local communities.

10.4. Consultation Forward Plan

There are a number of periodic corporate research, consultation and engagement activities undertaken by the council.

These are outlined below.

Residents' Perception Survey (every 6 months)

March, April, October, November

Citizens' Panel

February, May, September, December

Budget Consultation

January, November, December

10.5. Consultation and Engagement Annual Report

The council will publish an Annual Report, looking back on each year on what has been consulted on, the number participants taking part, and how we have acted on the results.

Appendix 1: Levels of consultation and engagement and key points to note

Type of activity	What's involved	Goal	Key points to note	Examples
Insight	Gathering residents/service user profile information	To understand the equality impact assessment (EIA) of any proposed change	The outcome of the insight gathering should inform any proposals and the impact on protected characteristics or other residents.	New Council Tax Benefits Scheme, assessing who and how recipients will be impacted by the proposed changes.
Inform	Providing information is a one way process of notifying people about local services, initiatives and issues that affect or may interest them	To provide the public with balanced objective information to assist them in understanding the issues and alternatives, opportunities and solutions, progress and performance as well as how to access services, It also enhances transparency.	The value of providing information should not be underestimated. Surveys often indicate people want more information about services in their area.	Barnet First, Press releases, the Council's website, Area Forums, posters, leaflets, social media.
Consult	Asking people for their views to inform decisions, services, plans, and changes	To obtain public feedback and views on proposed changes, priorities or new initiatives. While views are considered, the final decision rests with the council. Consulting is more than just providing information but less than inviting to participate in decision-making.	It is the primary way of ensuring council services respond to and reflect the needs of local people. Not always the best option as there may be other factors that will influence the decision. The final decision will rest with Councillors. The process must be made clear at the outset of the consultation, and the consultation should be inclusive and provide feedback on any decisions made.	Statutory examples: – Department of Health Annual Social Care User Survey; Introduction of a CPZ's – Proposed withdrawal or variance to a service or policy that could impact on customers or residents Non-statutory examples: consult on any relevant topics using surveys or focus groups i.e. Annual Residents Survey.
Involve	Involving people in the design, development and direction of activities and services in cooperation with public organisations	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solutions.	There is greater emphasis on relationship building It requires much more active involvement from resident than consultation. It is critical to be clear about the level of influence of participants will have.	Mystery shopping, Co production of services, Experts by Experience
Empower	We maintain an equal and effective working relationship	To place final decision making in the hands of the public. This builds on community involvement method but also includes a responsibility for the community to deliver the activities, actions and services agreed by the decision-making body.	Empowerment requires the greatest amount of input by the community and is sometimes known as community management or ownership.	Experts by Experience. Budgeting, , transfer of assets or management of them to the community, i.e. academy school, Pledgebank, Adopt a Place